

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

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INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK
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AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE
CINCPAC

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MY
SUBJECT: FURTHER SIGNS OF EARLY ELECTIONS

REF: KUALA LUMPUR 0141

1. THE GOVERNMENT-INFLUENCED NEW STRAITS TIMES ON JAN 16 GAVE FRONT-PAGE HEADLINES TO A STORY PRE- DICTING THAT NATIONAL ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD IN 1978. ACCORDING TO THE ARTICLE, A LOCAL KUALA LUMPUR OFFICIAL OF THE UNITED MALAYS NATIONAL ORGAN- IZATION (UMNO) TOLD THE FEDERAL TERRITORY LIAISON COMMITTEE THAT PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN HAD REVEALED THAT THE GENERAL ELECTION WILL "DEFINITELY BE HELD IN 1978, AND HE HAS ASKED US TO PREPARE OURSELVES FOR IT."

2. ON JAN 17 PRESS REPORTS QUOTED OTHER UMNO
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OFFICIALS AS DENYING THEY HAD RECEIVED ANY DIRECTIVE FROM THE PM CONCERNING EARLY ELECTIONS, AND DATUK HUSSEIN HIMSELF HAD NO COMMENT ON THE JAN 16 STORY. HOWEVER, THE DAILY STAR (OWNED BY THE NATIONAL FRONT'S MALAYSIAN CHINESE ASSOCIATION) QUOTED SOURCES "CLOSE TO THE PRIME MINISTER" THAT THE PM WAS "SLIGHTLY ANNOYED" AT THE JAN 16 ANNOUNCEMENT BE-

CAUSE THE MEETING WITH THE FEDERAL TERRITORY LIAISON COMMITTEE WAS HELD BEHIND CLOSED DOORS AND "NO ONE WAS TO MAKE ANY STATEMENTS ABOUT WHAT TRANSPRIRED ON THAT OCCASION."

3. MINISTER OF EDUCATION DATUK MUSA HITAM RECENTLY TOLD THE AMBASSADOR THAT PM HUSSEIN HAD COMMIS- SIONED "A SMALL GROUP OF US" TO GIVE HIM THEIR BEST ADVICE ON WHEN ELECTIONS SHOULD BE HELD. MUSA DID NOT COMMENT DIRECTLY ON THE NEWSPAPER REPORT, BUT HE PREDICTED THAT ELECTIONS WOULD BE HELD "IN THREE OR FOUR MONTHS" AND SAID THAT HE EXPECTED THE PM WOULD FOLLOW THE ADVICE OF THE "SMALL GROUP." (A RELIABLE LOCAL JOURNALIST HAS ALSO TOLD US HE HAS HEARD OF THE SMALL GROUP OF POLITICAL ADVISERS TO PM HUSSEIN, AND SAID THAT IT CONSISTS OF MUSA, FINANCE MINISTER TENGKU RAZALEIGH AND PRESUMABLY DEPUTY PM DR. MAHATHIR.)

4. SUBSEQUENTLY AN IMPORTANT YOUNG UMNO POLITICIAN AND MEMBER OF THE GOVERNMENT TOLD THE AMBASSADOR AT A JAN 17 SOCIAL FUNCTION THAT HE AND SOME COLLEAGUES IN THE UMNO YOUTH WING ARE RECOMMENDING EARLY ELECTIONS BUT SUGGESTING THEY BE ANNOUNCED WITH THE MAXIMUM "SUDDENNESS" POSSIBLE. THEY WERE RECOMMENDING SURPRISE BECAUSE THEY FELT THERE WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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MANY "OLD GUARD" ELEMENTS AT ALL LEVELS IN THE PARTY THAT NEEDED TO MAKE WAY FOR NEW BLOOD, AND THAT THEIR ENTRENCHED POSITIONS COULD BE FURTHER CONSOLIDATED IF THEY WERE GIVEN TOO MUCH ADVANCE NOTICE OF ELECTIONS.

5. COMMENT. ALTHOUGH THE PRESS HAS CARRIED STORIES OF EARLY ELECTIONS OFTEN IN THE PAST, THE JAN 16 ARTICLE IS THE FIRST TIME THE SOURCE OF THE INFORMATION HAS BEEN IDENTIFIED AS THE PRIME MINISTER. THESE DEVELOPMENTS CONFIRM OUR BELIEF THAT BARRING UNFORESEEN CHANGES IN THE POLITICAL BAROMETER ELECTIONS WILL BE HELD THIS YEAR, MOST PROBABLY BEFORE THE UMNO PARTY ELECTIONS IN EARLY JULY.

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